

WHERE TO GO IN

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An insider's guide to the Junkanoo parade. P. 40

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I AM CAYMANKIND

In Charge of Your Big Day Away

JoAnne V. Brown "makes miracles from scratch." She's the founder and CEO of Celebrations Ltd., a full-service wedding and event firm with 48 full-time employees: planners, designers, production crew, florists and laundry team (try washing linens for an 800-person soiree). Known as "Miss Jo" to her clients (mostly eager, excited couples), the Jamaican-born, UK-educated Brown has watched the Cayman Islands grow into an A-list destination wedding locale. Who doesn't love a vacation with some I-do's thrown in?



The Cayman Islands is not known for the quantity of weddings, but

the quality. We don't have all-inclusive venues or prepackaged offerings. Our weddings are customized and very personal.

OThe growth of

destination weddings has been phenomenal. People look at them now as a great way to vacation. It's like, "Let's go to the Cayman Islands. And oh, by the way, there's a wedding."

The largest wedding we've done was 800 people.

OMy first wedding was 380 people at a woman's home. That was a huge undertaking. I went to all the local restaurants and asked, "Can I get 10 chairs from you?" and so on. It worked!

OI will never forget the day we first arrived in Cayman. It was August really hot. We arrived one day after my husband and I got married. There we were at the airport with everything we owned in boxes and suitcases. There wasn't a taxi big enough for all our stuff. I'm sitting outside this tiny airport and here comes a customs officer. He says to me, "Can I get you a Pepsi?" Where else does that happen?

We've done underwater weddings. They're really cool. In the beginning, we didn't have a marriage officer who was a divemaster. Now we do. The couple and the marriage officer go underwater and hold up signs with the vows. Seriously.

OI planned all three of my children's weddings. But I got a lot of help. On those days, I was really able to just be a mom.

○For the Caymanian people, being Caymankind comes naturally. That feeling I got from the customs officer? That's the norm for us.



WHEREVER YOU FIND YOUR SMILE, YOU'LL FIND OURS.
THAT'S CAYMANKIND.



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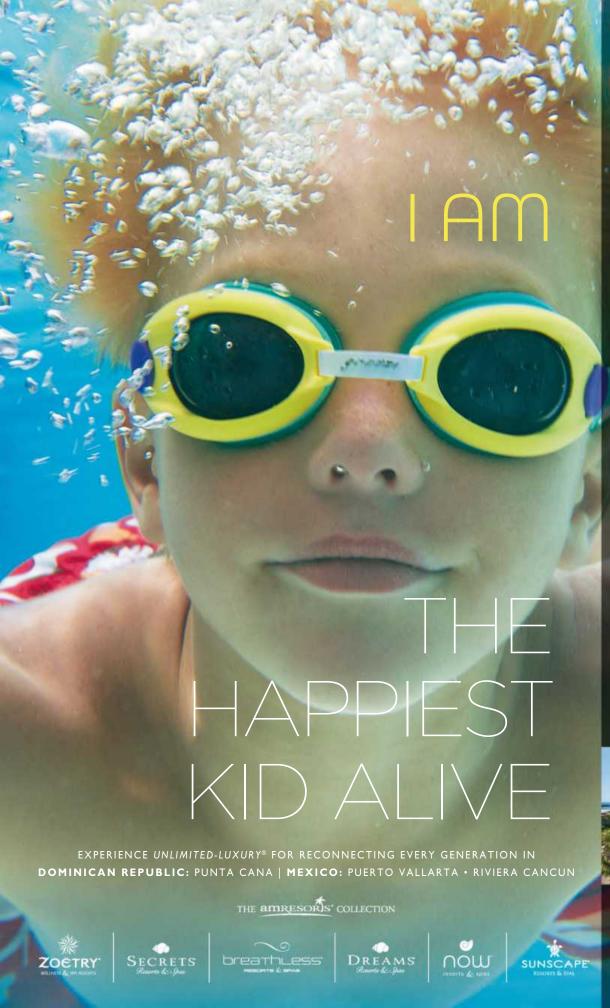
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Escape to the unspoiled Savai'i shore, on the southwest coast of Samoa. Photo by: Jon Whittle





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An ageless Dutch woman with a fondness for big jewelry, Henriette overheard me talking about my snorkeling plans. "The reef is much better near my house," she said in lightly accented English. "I will pick you up here tomorrow afternoon and we will go." It was how I found myself the next evening at her cliff-side house overlooking the ocean, sipping wine and admiring one of those sunsets the Caribbean produces like clockwork. The snorkeling had been good, but the company was better: Henriette was a true raconteur, with a treasure-trove of stories about an island she'd been coming to since the 1970s. She loved Statia (as the island is called) deeply, and all its shortcomings - mediocre, overpriced restaurants, spotty cell service, the lack of proper beaches — she laughed off as island quirks. "You need to relax and just

appreciate all the beauty around you," she told me.

Our writer Amanda Jones discovered that too when she traveled to Samoa for this month's cover story (p. 22). It's a place not without its challenges — limited Internet, few road signs and a carefree "island-time" attitude that often drives Westerners crazy — but once she let all that go, the warmth of the people and the magical landscape won her over.

It's a reminder that wherever your travels take you, being open — to meeting new people, to having new experiences and to accepting a different way of life will make your journey that much richer.

Jennifer Ceaser

Editorial Director

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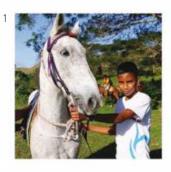
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LIMITED!

YOU'VE BEEN













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"CUBA IS A BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY WITH CULTURE AND SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE."

– Belinda Wasney, via Facebook

YOU ASKED

Q: When's the best time to go to Punta Cana? A: The Dominican Republic's all-inclusive hub is known for drawing a crowd year-round, but time it right, and you could miss the bulk of it. The sweet spot for visiting? April through May. Late spring ensures the spring-break frenzy has come and gone, and rates are on the downswing. Bonus: Temps are still moderate, and hurricane season hasn't even started yet — bring

WE ASKED

on the beach days.

Private plunge pool or secluded beach?

91% SAID BEACH

Q: Name an item you never travel without.

A: Whatever I can fit into a carry-on!

A: My passport and credit card. Nothing else needed!

A: The Aloha spirit.

A: A blow-up raft from the dollar store.

A: My running shoes.

A: Refillable water bottle.

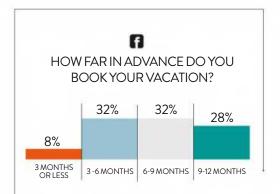


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WE'VE BEEN

Flying back to the United States from the Caribbean's St. Eustatius meant seven hours of layover in St. Martin — plenty of time to hitch a ride to the opposite (northeast) side of the island, eschewing the famous nude Orient Beach in favor of tiny Pinel Island. I paid the ferryman \$10 (round trip) to whisk me five minutes to this uninhabited speck of sand, on which a beach bar provided chaise longue setups with umbrellas and served perfectly chilled French rosé by the glass.

- Editorial Director Jennifer Ceaser



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Little Torch Key, Florida

Two distinct island destinations to lose yourself in.

OCEAN KEY RESORT & SPA

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Key West, Florida



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Palawan, Philippines

Make your way to El Nido, the epic entrance to the Bacuit Archipelago, on the northern tip of Palawan. From there, take a boat to Lagen Island Resort or Miniloc Island Resort, where kayaks call your name. Start paddling toward Indiana Jones-style hidden lagoons and coves. Stroke, stroke. Blue starfish. Stroke, stroke. Sea urchins. If you have enough energy left, paddle your way over to Entalula island to scale the limestone wall, eat lunch with your toes in the sand and snorkel over candy-colored coral.



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EXPLORING FLOATING VILLAGES IN CAMBODIA

CHOCOLATE: PAUL SEHEULT/ALAMY

NOW

CARRIACOU

Caroling gets a new twist at the CARRIACOU PARANG FESTIVAL, Dec. 18-20. Backed by mandolins, guitars and shakshaks (maracas), groups compete with both traditional songs and ones that call out political and citizen misbehavior. No wonder they're called melees.

ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES

Set your alarm for 4 a.m. The NINE MORNINGS FESTI-VAL, Dec. 16-24, starts before sunrise, with street concerts, Christmas-light competitions and offbeat events like bananaeating contests. Try the homemade ginger beer, sorrel juice and other seasonal specialties.

ST. CROIX

Stake your spot on the Christiansted boardwalk well before sunset for the CHRISTMAS BOAT PARADE on Dec. 12. Seaplane flyovers warm up the crowd for the lavishly decorated watercraft. Watch for reindeer hanging out under palm trees and mermaids sharing deck space with Santa.

MAR

HINDU NEW YEAR'S EVE

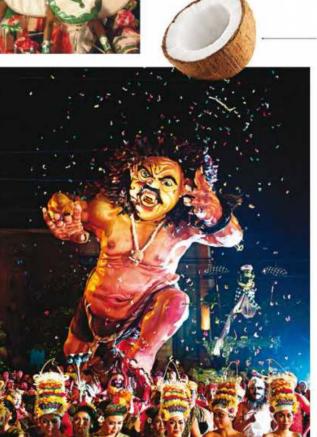
on March 9 is even more raucous than Times Square. Using cymbals, gongs, drums and fireworks, the Balinese scare away monstrous ogoh-ogohs: huge pâpier-maché figures representing evil spirits.

TOBAGO

Wrap up Easter weekend by attending the Buccoo Goat Races on March 29. These goats even have jockeys who run alongside. Stick around for the CRAB RACES that follow: Losing crustaceans end up in the pot.













RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO

Take a day trip inland to Chichen Itza to celebrate the **SPRING EQUINOX** on March 20, when the sun creates the astonishing optical illusion of a snake slithering up El Castillo Pyramid. Tip: It's still visible the week before and after the equinox, and crowds are smaller then.

GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND

Compete in coconut bowling and coconut-tart-eating contests at the PELICAN POINT COCONUT FESTIVAL on March 28. Or just chill with a Gully Wash (a killer combo of coconut water, gin and condensed milk) while you feast on coconut-fried shrimp, coconut rice and barbecue ribs with, you guessed it, coconut sauce.

MAY LOST VAN DYKE BY

JOST VAN DYKE, BVI

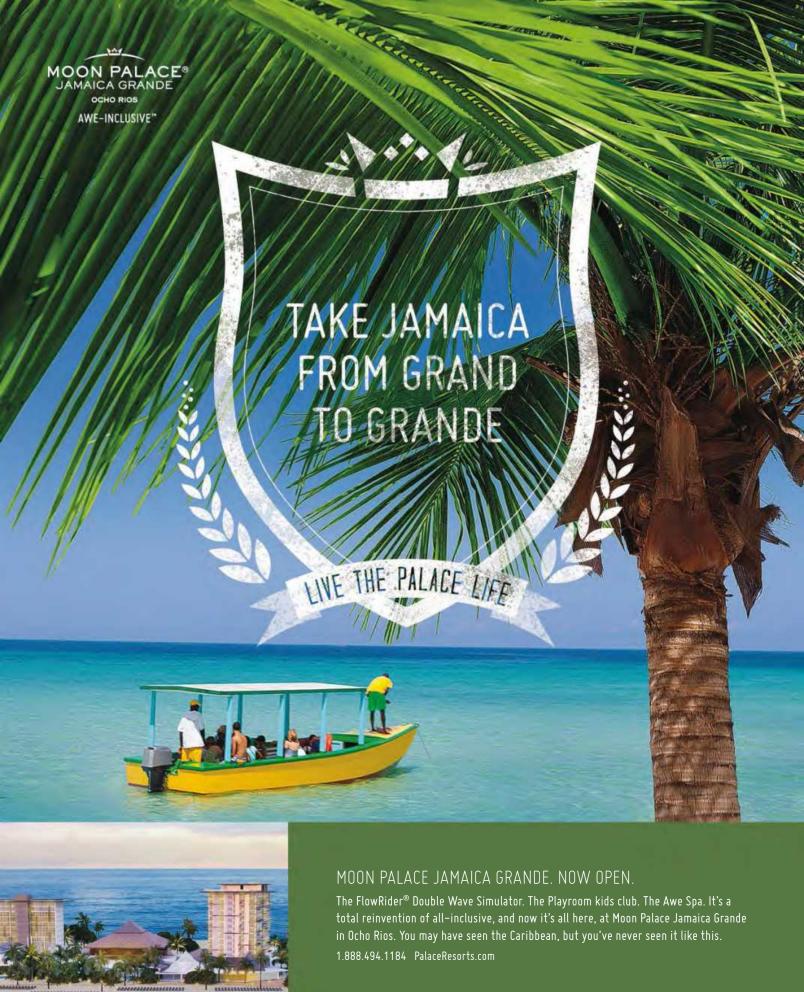
Admire the classic timbered vessels at FOXY'S WOODEN BOAT REGATTA, May 27-29. While the crews are out racing, continue the party at Foxy's Beach Bar with nonstop live music and drinks concocted with Foxy's Firewater Rum.

GRENADA

Some of the world's best chocolate is made here, and the CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL, May 13-22, is your chance to indulge. Bean-to-bar tours, cooking classes and cocoa-laden menus offer plenty of tasting ops, with chocolate meditation and chocolate spa treatments to increase your glow.

GLOUCESTER, ENGLAND

Chase a 7-pound wheel of double Gloucester down a steep hill at the COOPER'S HILL CHEESE ROLLING on May 30. Warning: The cheese reaches speeds of 70 mph, and competitors spend more time tumbling than running. Newbies can go for the slower uphill races.



POINT OF VIEW

These five Caribbean hikes let you stretch your legs and see the islands from a new — and higher — perspective.

BY ANN VANDERHOOF

THE PITONS, SAINT LUCIA

The island's first inhabitants believed these twin volcanic spires brought them closer to heaven. You might feel the same atop the taller Gros Piton, rising 2,530 feet above sea level. Note that the trail, which ascends through rainforest and volcanic boulders, can be strenuous. And Petit Piton might be smaller, at 2,438 feet, but leave this nearly vertical ascent up a narrow path to the pros.

CONCORD FALLS,

One hike, three waterfalls: Easiest is the lowest, with a paved road taking you almost all the way to the water. To reach the second, **Au Coin**, cross an old nutmeg plantation and head deep into tropical forest. A more vigorous trip leads to the third, **Fontainebleau**, which thunders 65 feet down into a plunge pool.

LEINSTER BAY TO WATERLEMON CAY,

ST. JOHN, USVI
Don't forget your
mask and fins on this
island-edge trail: You're
hiking to St. John's
best snorkel spot.
Explore the ruins of
19th-century Annaberg
Sugar Plantation at the
start of the hike, then
trek to Waterlemon
Beach. From there,
it's a short swim to
reef-surrounded
Waterlemon Cay — and

a bonanza of turtles.

rays and iridescent fish.

SHIRLEY HEIGHTS, ANTIGUA

Hummingbirds, crashing waves, humpback whales: It's hard to know just where to look as you climb the trail from English Harbour's Galleon Beach to the most famous view in Antigua. Look for Montserrat's volcano smoldering in the distance.

GUANAPO GORGE, TRINIDAD

Bring a swimsuit for this one. It starts with a walk in the rainforest, but much of the "hike" is through a fast-flowing river — the ideal antidote to the tropical heat. Floating past emperor butterflies is cool — but not nearly as cool as sliding down a rock chute into a foaming pool below. Trust us, you'll want another go.





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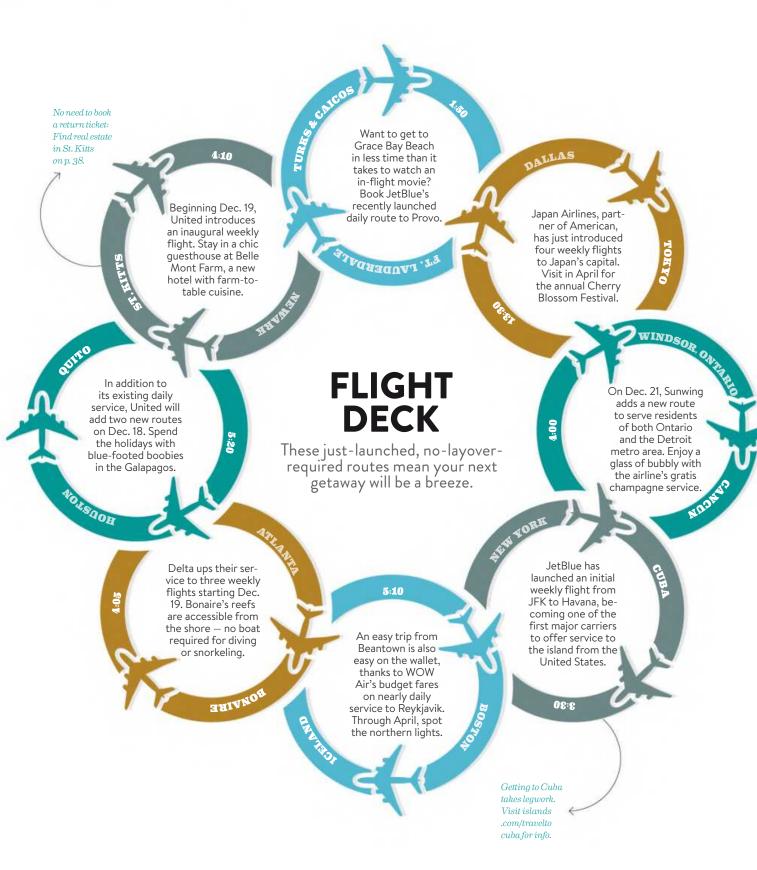
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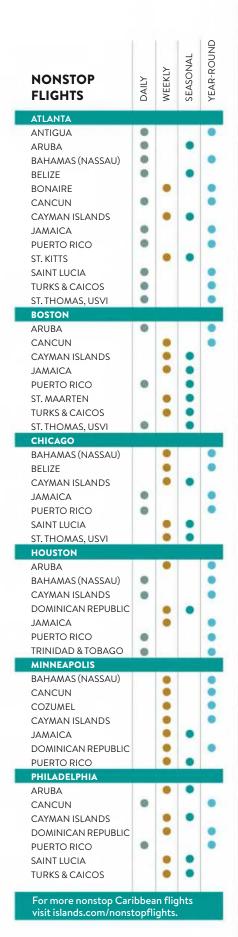
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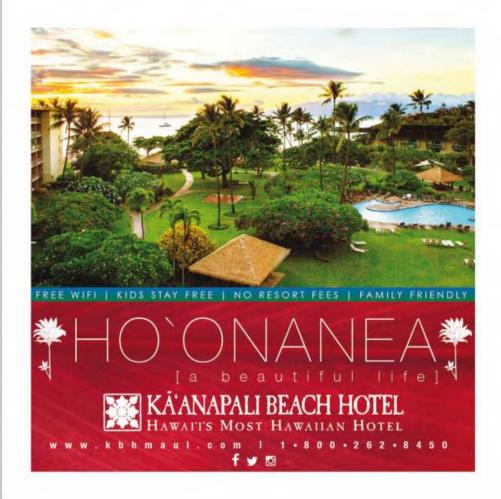
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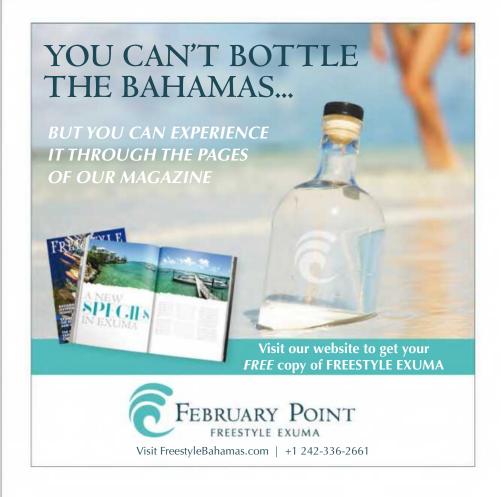
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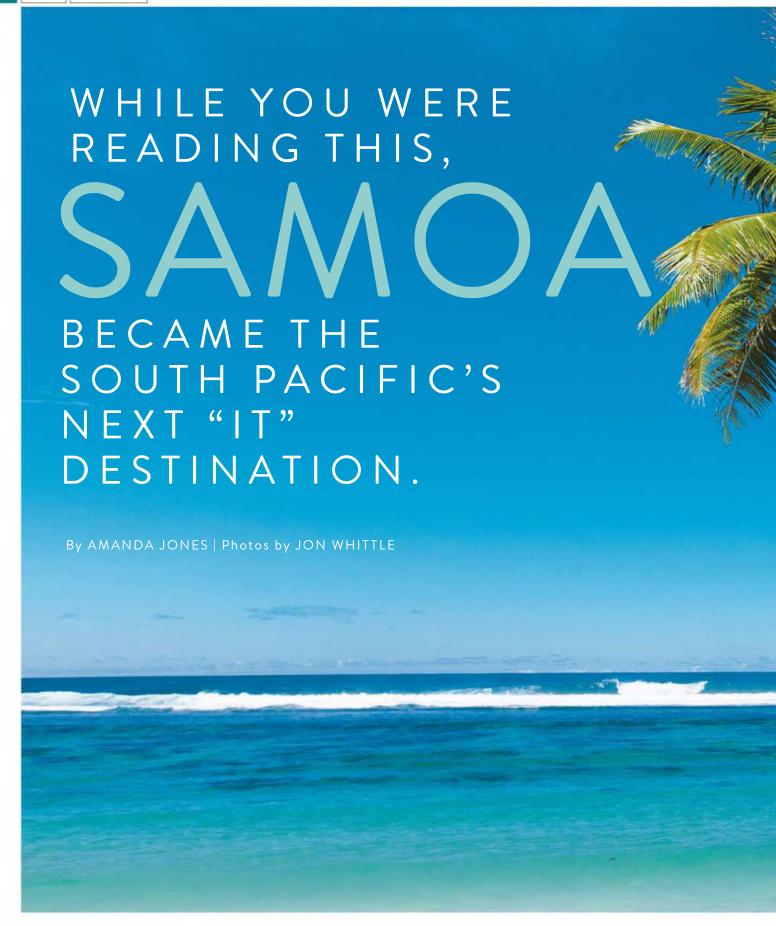














IS EARLY AFTERNOON WHEN MY GUIDE, OLSEN VA'AFUSUAGA, ASKS, "SHALL WE TAKE THE TWO-HOUR OR FIVE-HOUR RIVER WALK?"

"THE TWO-HOUR," I ANSWER. I'VE BEEN TO SAMOA BEFORE. I'M FAMILIAR

WITH THE "SAMOAN WAY," WHICH IS AN ACTUAL THING CALLED "FA'A SAMOA."







The people are faultlessly polite and will do anything to please you, but time enters a black hole here, slowing to other-dimensional speed. It's weird and fantastic at the same time. So I'm pretty sure that two hours actually means three, and five means seven.

I follow Olsen's tautly muscled back to the Faleseela Riverside Walk. "Walk" and "riverside" are both euphemisms; it's a rock-groping pursuit mostly *in* the rapids and up vertical rock-face walls encased in vivid green jungle. You won't find any steps, ropes, gates or helmets. This hike depicts modern Samoa, a place where unfettered adventure can still be found in untouched wilderness, and the rules of the Westernized world have not caught on. In fact, Olsen is the only guide who can lead travelers on this particular journey; the trek crosses through his ancestral land.

Samoa is like Tahiti 75 years ago, or Fiji 50 years ago. Right now, it's less expensive than other South Pacific islands, and almost no one is here. Granted, it's harder to get to — the only direct flight is from Honolulu once a week — but once you've arrived, you get a sense of discovery, a feeling of having reached a place before the film crews and honeymooners do.

WHEN TO GO

TO NOV

Temperatures
rarely stray outside the range of
82 to 89 degrees.
It rains year-round
(hence the lush
greenery), but
you get more

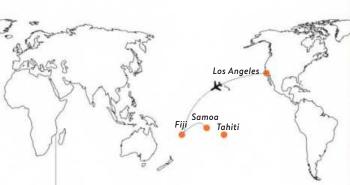
precipitation from December

to February.

To get the most out of Samoa, you need to be an intrepid traveler. We're not talking Everest summit swagger or Congo River courageous; it just requires patience and flexibility. Infrastructure here is blissfully — sometimes frustratingly — discombobulating. Internet access *might* be available, and sometimes it *might* even work. The roads are reliable but rarely have signs. Service is executed with genuine warmth at glacial speed. If you are used to your umbrellagarnished cocktail arriving within three minutes, or if you expect Frette linens, don't visit Samoa. If you want a destination where a feast of the world's freshest fish runs \$15, an overwater bungalow costs half the price of Tahiti, the water hosts no noxious species, and the beaches are blazingly white, put Samoa on your list.

Right now, Olsen, his daughter and I are the only people on this river, a cacophony of exotic birds overhead. We encounter five waterfalls during the climb, and we swim in each one with no regard to time, Fa'a Samoa style. Four hours later, the "two-hour" loop concludes. Olsen then leads me back to his house for Koko Samoa, homegrown cocoa beans roasted over an open fire on a sheet of metal roofing, then ground and mixed with sugar to make a dairy-free





hot chocolate brimming with antioxidants.

Olsen lives on Upolu, the archipelago's main island. Formerly Western Samoa, this Samoa should not be confused with American Samoa, the smaller neighboring nation that's an unincorporated territory of the United States. This Samoa belongs to no one. Only one chain hotel can be found in the whole country (the swanky new Sheraton near the airport), and the sole chain restaurant is a McDonald's in the capital, Apia. Most Samoans still live in extended family groups in *fales*, open-sided houses, and they raise or catch their own food. The whole country is the size of Rhode Island and has 190,000 people, as opposed to the 1.1 million of America's smallest state. A traffic jam in Apia is when a driver stops to chat with a friend and five cars back up.

The locals are raconteurs — it's part of their culture. There's a lot of sittin' and a-talkin' in this country. At the new Aga Reef Resort, owner Apete Meredith talks animatedly about how the island is willing to change but mostly refuses to — and, as the parable goes, sometimes the young do not know best. "Yes, we have a democratic government and a police force, but the first line of authority still lies with the village elders," he says. "They adhere to the traditional ways. If you commit a crime, you are brought before the tribunal, and your punishment is meted out. For theft or adultery, you are made to kneel under a fine mat in the hot sun, and villagers can whack you with a stick." This probably accounts for Samoa's low crime rate.

Apete also recounts how his father started this resort project, building a man-made island and a solid bridge to reach it — all by having boulders and bags of concrete carried by hand into the water. It took years. Apete, returning from university in New Zealand and swollen with newfound knowledge, took his father aside. "You're using too much concrete," he told the old man. "It makes no sense. Get an architect and an engineer." His father, a popular chief and politician, bestowed upon him the withering look elders are entitled to give know-it-alls, saying, "I am the architect and the engineer."

Then Apete's father died, shortly followed by the





GETTING HERE

LAX doesn't offer any direct flights to Samoa, but Fiji Airways has packages that allow you to stop in Fiji, then fly to Apia. They also have a new fleet of planes and the cheapest business-class tickets available. Springboard Vacations. an LA-based operator that specializes in South Pacific travel, can tailor a trip according to your budget and preference. springboard vacations.com

devastating tsunami that hit in 2009. People fled for the hills. Destruction reigned on the south side of the country. In the path of the water, most resorts were swept away. Fearfully, Apete returned to Aga Reef expecting to see everything gone, but his father's island and bridge remained standing. There are some things the outside world just cannot teach you.

Post-tsunami shock was followed by a severe cyclone in 2012. Samoa has spent the past few years rebuilding, which is another reason to visit now. Coconuts Beach Club, an American-owned resort on the southern coast, was decimated in the tsunami, but it now has six elegant overwater bungalows, as well as several large beach villas and *fales*. The restaurant, which used to be more of a beach shack, is now a stylish open-air bar and dining room that serves mojitos and local dishes like *oka'la*, raw fish marinated in lime and coconut milk. The same thing happened with Aga Reef; after the tsunami, Apete built luxury air-conditioned *fales* on his father's island, with six more facing the lagoon.

One effect of Samoa becoming the next "it" destination is that some locals now require admission to enter their villages and see the sights. A villager sits in a tiny grass hut all day, charging visitors 10 tala (about \$5 U.S.) to see the Togitogiga Waterfall or loll in the lagoon of Vavau Beach.

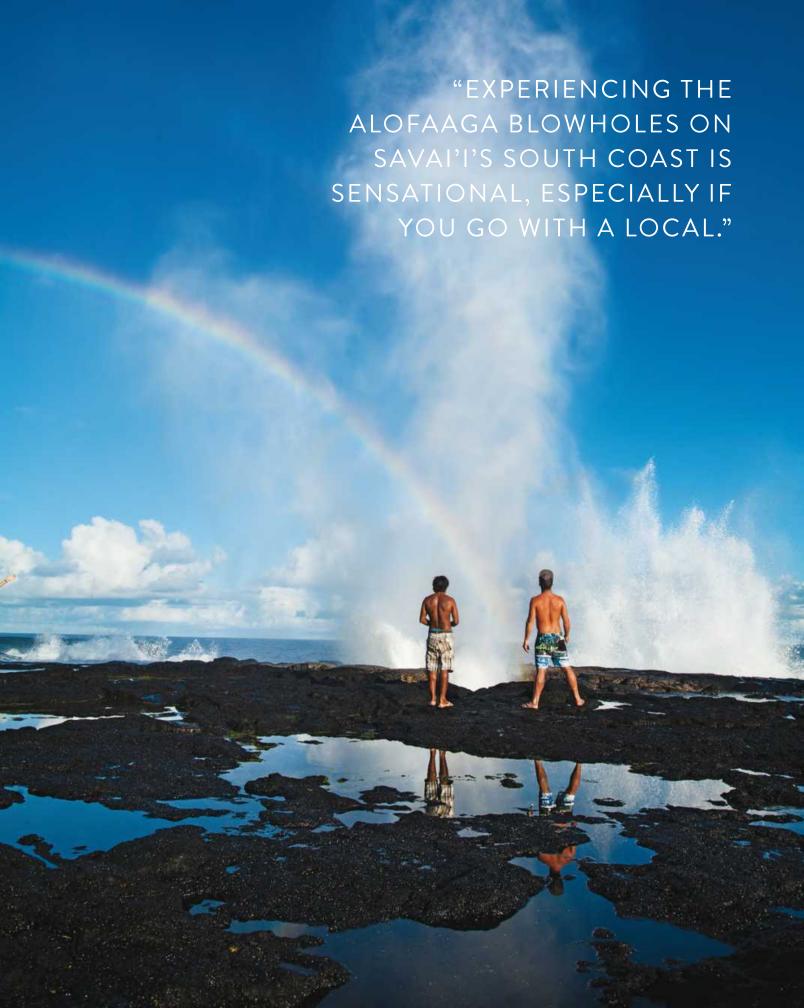




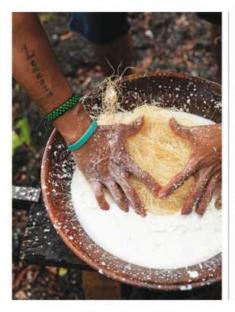
















The same entrance-fee practice applies on Savai'i, Samoa's larger, less-developed island, where even fewer tourists venture. Out here, the grass hut is likely to be abandoned if there's a wedding, a rugby match or a *fiafia* (feast), and income takes second priority.

There's no real town on Savai'i — merely villages clustered along the single road that skirts the 650-square-mile island. The villages are impeccably tidy: gardens lined with painted white rocks, lawns mowed, no litter. The chieftains compete with each other to have the most immaculate village.

If there are black holes beyond black holes, then Savai'i's temporal reality is one step further again. It takes about 15 minutes to get a cocktail out here, but by the time I reach this island, the American hamster-on-the-wheel in me has slowed to a crawl. The sunlight playing over the ocean makes for a proper distraction.

Although plenty of hotels can be found on Savai'i, there's only one high-end place: Aganoa Lodge, on the south side of the island, preferred by surfers with discretionary income. Built with safari-style platform tents, the lodge is located on a private peninsula beside a calm lagoon and a surf break just beyond the protective reef.

The big excitement for the day on Savai'i's south coast is to head to the Alofaaga Blowholes. Actually, the latter is a sensational activity, especially if you go there with a local. Cue Lee, a Savai'ian who works at Aganoa Lodge.

"Go nearby," he says, in self-taught English. I am to follow him toward the opening of a hole that has been

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO **Currency** is the Samoan tala. ATMs can be found at the airport and on both islands, but they can be scarce. Carry small local bills to cover entrance fees. If you visit a remote village, neither men nor women should wear shorts. Wear long pants or ask to borrow a lavalava (a sarong). When entering a Samoan fale, take off your shoes outside and sit on the mat quickly if elders are present. Tuck your feet under you or sit cross-legged. Do

not point your

feet at anyone.

Never wear

bathing suits or

bikinis anvwhere

but the beach.

formed in a lava rock shelf protruding over the ocean. "Take dis," he instructs, handing me a coconut bashed from a nearby palm. "I yell, you t'row." A roaring sound builds. As the hole begins to foam furiously, he says, "T'row!" The rock erupts as a massive swell forces its way through a 2-foot-wide hole, shooting my coconut skyward, creating a double rainbow at its peak.

That night, the staff at Aganoa Lodge throws a *fiafia*, a Samoan party with an *umu* feast. A Samoan *fiafia* is not yet commercialized like in other South Pacific nations, where the dancers are a little too polished, the food prepared unseen. Unlike most Polynesian cultures, Samoans don't use an underground pit oven. Rather, they use glowing hot lava rocks, wrapping most of the food in banana leaves. They cook on the rocks, making sweaty work as the local men, bare-chested, crouch over the fires, handling much with their bare hands. Five hours later, we have a spread fit for a chief: a whole roasted piglet, cooked reef fish, raw fish, chicken, cooked bananas, breadfruit, taro, sweet potato and chard in fresh coconut milk.

The dancing after the meal is chaotic and vigorous, with the Samoans laughing and pulling exaggerated faces. The men leap about athletically, performing war dances; the women move their arms to mimic waves.

The scene epitomizes Samoa today: unadulterated Polynesian life among exuberant people who have somehow managed to sidestep mass tourism and the Westernization of their culture. Get here, quickly, before all that changes.

"If a mainland child tried to do this, he'd drown. The kids must learn to

swim because they boat to school, starting at age 6."



WHERE: CAMBODIA
THE FIND: A SUSTAINABLE
FLOATING COMMUNITY

housands of brown mayflies swarm our small motorboat as we speed through a thicket of green river bushes. I am on my way to the Prek Toal floating village. My mission: to see endangered water birds

that breed within the most important UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Southeast Asia. The two-hour boat ride on the Tonle Sap River began at the Mechrey floating village, and we're passing a remarkable landscape, while

astonishing scenes unfold. A 2-year-old waits patiently on the tip of a canoe while his father meticulously sets out fish traps. We see colorful boathouses with dried palm leaves for walls, buttressed by strong, brown bamboo platforms that keep them afloat. These Cambodian villagers live, eat, trade and thrive entirely from the river.

Two toddlers paddle an 8-foot canoe with calm determination."If a mainland child tried to do this, he'd drown," says Sanh, my guide from the Sam Veasna Center for wildlife experiences. She explains that there are no bus rides to school for the children of the 170 floating villages nestled along the 160 miles of the river. Pointing out a small, blue floating hut on the lake a primary school — she says, "The kids must learn to swim because they boat to school on their own, starting at age 6."

Then she exclaims, "Look! An Asian palm swift flying overhead!" Minutes later, a tiny, white-throated kingfisher rustles in the bushes on edge of the lake. Oh yeah, the birds. With my amateur birdwatching skills and so many distracting sights — fishermen adjusting their nets, motorboats zooming by, endless rows of boathouses — it's hard to focus on the task at hand.

Sanh reveals that it's currently wet season, and the lake is at its lowest levels. Most of the water birds arrive during the dry season, when the river swells to four times its size, creating both prime breeding grounds and food security in Prek Toal.

"We will see a few birds, but not as many as during

TRAVEL TIP

 $The \ river \ actually \ rises \ during \ dry \ season, October \ through \ April-a \ peak \ time \ for \ spotting \ birds.$

SAY OUR EDITORS

the dry season, December through May," she says.

Despite this news, I revel in the unique culture of the floating villages, which depend on the invasive water hyacinth. The plant's thick leaves and heavy roots cover the lake in thousands of bright green patches. Gliding past the homes, I see locals using hyacinth for cooking, as compost for their floating gardens and, most impressively, sustainable crafting.

At Prek Toal's Saray
Cooperative, seven women
weave hyacinth into
potholders, baskets, waste
bins and rugs. The long roots
of the plant have been dried
on the docks for two weeks
to create a strong weaving
material. The women tell me
about a huge shipment that
they have been creating for a
biannual Australian client.



A young boy paddles his metal boat on the Tonle Sap River.

Thirty-year-old Sophal Chan becomes my teacher for the next 45 minutes while she shows me how to weave the plant and create my own potholder. She could do this in half the time it takes me to grasp the skill. "Left, under, over, over, under, right," I murmur to myself. Before long, I have a rather impressive piece of handiwork. Sanh is shocked and says many tourists need guidance

through the whole process. I guess I'm just a natural.

In addition to their handmade goods, local women also earn income by taking visitors on village tours. Eager to learn more. I oblige, discovering catfish farms, crocodile farms and floating gardens along the way. All of these sustainable resources are attached to families' floating homes. The hard work involved with building these aquatic villages is humbling, as is the apparent happiness and solitude that comes from being connected with the water.

I ask to paddle the small canoe, which is much more difficult than it looks. While at the helm, Sanh spots a rare lesser adjunct soaring above us. I smile, content with watching its graceful ascent, feeling at peace with the river.

— Adrienne Jordan

MORE FLOATING VILLAGES

THAILAND Koh Panyi is a Muslim community built on stilts and composed of homes, shops, a mosque, a school — even a soccer field for children.

HONG KONG Amid its bustling harbor, floating village Aberdeen is backed by skyscrapers. Locals peddle the catch of the day and offer sampan rides.

VIETNAM The bluffs of Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, surround several traditional fishing villages that date back to the 19th century and house over 1,500 people.



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LIFE HERE

Easter Island

Meet Javier Ika. When the native islander isn't busy carving intricate Moai statues to sell as souvenirs, he's roaming the crater of Rano Kau; it's home to the 17th-century Birdman competition, where islanders once hurled themselves from cliffs and swam through precarious waters for the chance to become king. If he's not there, he's likely spearfishing and free diving along the remote and craggy coast below the Poike volcano. Swimming for five-plus hours? No problem. Snagging seafood straight from the Pacific? He's got it mastered. Hang with Javier and you'll never go hungry.



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A TOP NYC CHEF
GOES EXPAT
IN TULUM

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GET PERFECT WILDLIFE PHOTOS ON THESE ISLANDS

50
HOLIDAYTREATS
FROM AROUND
THE WORLD

Forging the Farm-to-Table Scene in Tulum

BY SUNSHINE FLINT





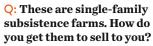
When the chef at one of the best restaurants in the world René Redzepi of Noma – wants a tropical break and a divine meal, he heads to chef Eric Werner's Hartwood in Tulum, Mexico, Redzepi is such a fan that he wrote the intro to Hartwood: Bright, Wild Flavors from the Edge of the Yucatan, a new cookbook by Werner and his partner (in life and business), Mya Henry. It's part recipe book, part ode to the Maya ingredients that Werner has devoted the last six years to learning and preparing at his 100 percent sustainable, open-air restaurant, after he relocated from his native New York.

Q: You built a world-class restaurant in the jungle that relies solely on solar power and a wood-burning oven. How does that work?

A: We take nothing for granted here. Our water is brought in from interior springs. Everything runs on solar power, and we break down all waste organically. You have to plan ahead and put a lot of thought into it when you want to sustain a restaurant off the grid.

Q: How did you learn to cook with local produce?

A: On my days off, I usually drive into the Yucatan interior looking for new ingredients and new farms. The growers respond to my curiosity and show me different ways to use their vegetables.



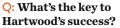
A: You make friends first. They become purveyors when you repeatedly show that you're going to follow through. The producers have families and rely on my business to sustain their own. We worked with one grower to turn his one-family farm into a 50-hectare organic co-op, and we buy our corn, squash, beans, sugar cane, mangoes, limes and mandarins there.

Q: And you also focus on local Yucatan seafood?

A: The Gulf of Mexico provides our soft-shell crab and Maya prawns, while we get the rest of our fish from the Caribbean. And locals taught me how to spearfish — now the restaurant has four boats.

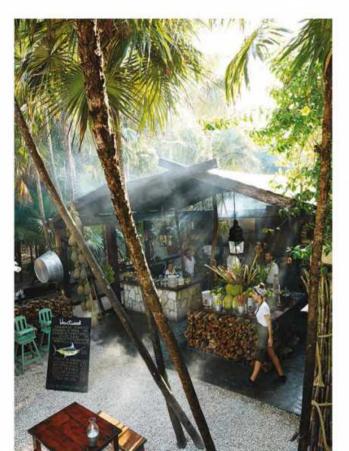
Q: Why Tulum, and what's it like living there?

A: Mya and I came here many times over the past 15 years and fell in love with how undeveloped it is. Tulum's main beach road still doesn't have power or water lines. We live about 6 kilometers outside of town in a house run by solar power, and our daughter attends the local school. It's an experience to immerse yourself in another culture, but we don't think of Tulum as a foreign country — this is



our home.

A: There's a sense of pride when you have a business that attracts patrons from Mexico and all over the world. We focus on the day to day — that's how you achieve longevity. hartwoodtulum.com



Cozumel

I ride to live, I ride to breathe, I ride to be free.





t. Kitts offers an assortment of residential developments in its 65 square miles — everything from affordable beachfront condos to fourbedroom luxury villas high in the hills. Here are three new places to call home.

CHRISTOPHE HARBOUR

This major development is remaking the peninsula on the island's southern end, where you can glimpse Nevis, just 2 miles across a narrow strait. Christophe Harbour will sprawl across 2,500 acres, with a variety of properties and lots available that will be completed over several phases. Located around the Great Salt Pond, which is being turned into a marina and superyacht port, the homes will be joined by a Tom Fazio golf course in 2017 and a Park Hyatt St. Kitts in 2018.

Lots at Harbourside, priced from \$1.5 million, allow buyers to build their own homes and have 40 feet of overwater buildable area, plus the ability to construct a custom dock, boathouse or private beach. The Sandy Bank Bay development stretches up into the hills above the Great Salt Pond and around Sandy Bank Bay beach; lots there range from \$700,000 to \$7.8 million.

There are also 47 turnkey Ocean Grove Villas starting at \$865,000 up to \$1.2 million. Fractional ownership at the Windswept Residence Club begins at \$450,000, with access to the rental pool. christopheharbour.com

Try before you buy: From \$850 per night

KITTITIAN HILL

At the opposite end of the island, nestled on the slopes of Mount Liamuiga, this 400-acre development is built around a working organic farm, hotel and spa, with views north across the water to the green peaks of St. Eustatius. It aims for a



lighter footprint by using local craftsmen, sustainable materials, native plantings and a car-free village center planned for the end of this year. Also coming: an openair cinema, a farm-to-table restaurant, Refinery, and a championship golf course designed by Ian Woosnam.

The one-bedroom cottages and farmhouses at the hotel portion of the community, Belle Mont Farm, have an airy West Indian style. They boast high ceilings and ample front porches by top hotel designer and architect Bill Bensley, who is also responsible for the look of the entire community. The 84 cottages are



Left: Kittitian Hill's cottages. Above: Views from a fourbedroom villa at Christophe Harbour. sold out, but fractional ownership is still available in the farmhouses, starting from \$405,000. In the Yaya Groves area, three- and four-bedroom private

villas start at \$2.5 million (fractional is also available), while the 52 condos and studios in the Village start at \$405,000 for full ownership. *kittitianhill.com* **Try before you buy:** *From \$575 per night*

EMBASSY SUITES BY HILTON ST. KITTS, PELICAN BAY

Just outside of the capital Basseterre, on the Caribbean side of the island in Frigate Bay, this all-condo resort is slated for a 2016 opening. The seven-acre site is on a hillside that slopes down to the beach and will eventually include six low-rise buildings of five floors. Two beachfront buildings have been completed with 112 units, and two more are under construction on the hillside for a total of 226 units. The resort will have a large central pool near the beach, a nature trail, a great lawn for field games and an outdoor restaurant with a floating deck. One-bedrooms will have two terraces off the living room and master suite, while the studios have a terrace off the living area. Top-floor units will also have landscaped roof gardens. The condos are wholly owned and range from \$405,000 to \$560,000. pelicanbaydevelopment.com

Try before you buy: The resort is set to open in August 2016.



M. LANCE TAVANA AND JENNIFER MOYER, property owners at Christophe Harbour Hometown: Charleston, S.C. Occupations: Reconstructive plastic surgeon; executive coach

OUR THREE CENTS

1. We went to St. Kitts on our honeymoon eight years ago and have gone every year since. It's still a young island in terms of development, and we like that it has only local restaurants. 2. In 2009, we became part of the founders group at Christophe Harbour. We bought a %-acre lot on the hillside in the Sandy Bank Bay area of the development. Our view looks out toward the Great Salt Pond and the marina. 3. We're not going to be retiring for quite some time, so our home will be a vacation home for now. It's easy to visit for a few days and totally disconnect from daily life.

FROM TOP: COURTESY ARLENE NASH-FERGUSON; MIKE THEISS/GETTY; RICHARD ELLIS/AGE FOTOSTOCK; RICK LEW/GETTY

DANCING QUEEN

A local shares her love of **Nassau's** Junkanoo street festival and where to take it all in.

Nassau









A spirited Junkanoo parade; colorful kiosks serve Bahamian cuisine, like

I wore my first Junkanoo costume when I was 4. As to why I still rush in – what we call the dancing of Junkanoo – it's something my heart and soul just respond to; I'm answering a call I don't fully understand.

What makes the Bahamas Junkanoo unique is that we make our own music as we parade. It's part of our African heritage. All night, you'll hear goatskin drums. cowbells whistles and horns.

It takes months to finish a costume, made entirely of paper. Each group chooses a theme, and I love how, as a dancer, I decide

which part of the story I want to tell. I like for my costumes to have meaning. Dancing my creation down the street is such an immense joy.

The Ministry of Tourism sets up bleachers on most streets for visitors to watch the parade. If you want to see backof-house drama, go to what we call the holding area, where groups dress in costume and assemble. For a less structured viewing spot, go to Shirley Street. There are no barricades, so some people believe that's where the real flavor is.

During the parade, vendors sell Bahamian food, like conch fritters, macaroni and cheese. chicken wings and guava duff.

To make guava duff, they boil

guava with sugar and roll it in dough, like a jellyroll. In the old days, it was steamed in a pillowcase. Now it's steamed or baked, sliced and topped with a sauce made from cream, sugar and a hint of rum.

On my birthday, I must have a bowl of conch salad. Nobody beats The Twin Brothers at the Fish Fry on Arawak Cay. They have a creation called tropical conch salad, made with mango and pineapple - I absolutely love it.

To relax, I take my grandchildren on drives. My favorite spot has a 180-degree vista of the ocean. Take East Bay Street heading toward Yamacraw Hill. There's a hairpin turn — that's the place. -as told to Brooke Morton

ARLENE NASH-**FERGUSON**

AGE 65

OCCUPATION

Director of culture and heritage for Bahamas Ministry of Tourism bahamas.com

JUNKANOOS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

BEST-KNOWN

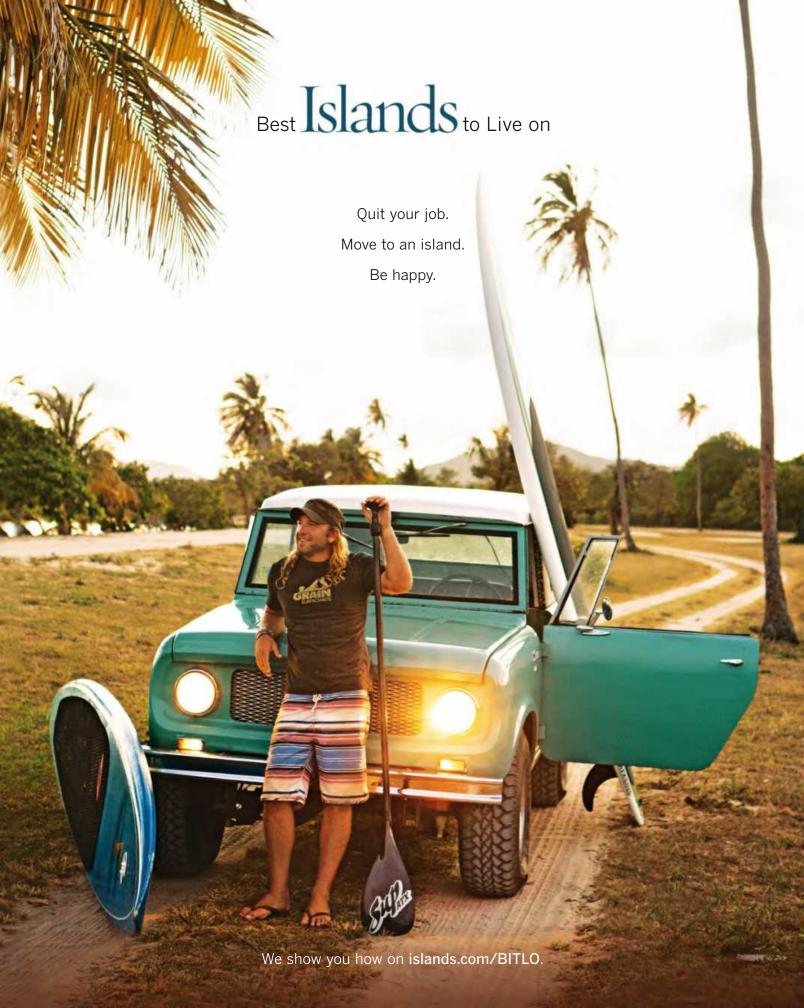
- Boxing Day, Dec. 26
- New Year's Day, Jan. 1

LESSER-KNOWN

- Easter Monday
- Bahamian Labor Day, the first Friday in June
- Bahamian Independence Day, July 10
- Emancipation Day, the first Monday in August

STRAW WORK

Since the 1700s. Bahamian women have been plaiting straw. Our women do exquisite work. My souvenir suggestion is any item, like a hat or a purse, made of Bahamian straw - dried palm branches, crafted by locals.



THE 8 BEST ISLANDS FOR WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY



STORY BY JON WHITTLE

Waiting hours to nab a single photograph of a bald eagle. Coming face to face with a massive grizzly bear. Wildlife photography has long been a specialist pursuit for the intrepid and (slightly) crazy, but as the world gets smaller and camera technology improves, now is the time to hop into the genre.

So lace up your boots, grab a raincoat and let's explore.





THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

Primary focus: Penguins Secondary focus: Elephant seals, albatrosses, orcas Best time to go: October

through April

Lens choice: 16 mm to 100 mm

Bar none, the Falkland Islands are the single best island destination for wildlife photography. Located off the eastern coast of Argentina, this British territory hosts five different species of penguins, countless birds, elephant seals, sea lions, orcas and whales. Most animals are readily accessible, especially on Sea Lion Island, where animal/human interaction is as easy as walking into the middle of 1,000 penguins, holding still, and waiting for them to surround you. The gentoo penguins are not shy, so don't be surprised if you feel something pecking at your shoelaces. Other notable islands include Saunders, where you'll find a massive population of black-browed albatrosses; Bleaker Island, home to the king cormorant and rockhopper penguins; and East Falkland, where you'll get to shoot the king penguin rookery complete with fuzzy baby birds. What to bring: Layers, layers, layers. Expect waves of

sun, rain, wind and hail to cycle overhead periodically throughout the day.

Pro tip: Hold still. It sounds simple, but if you pick a spot on the edge of a rookery and just wait, the birds will come.





GALAPAGOS ISLANDS, ECUADOR

Primary focus:

Marine and land iguanas
Secondary focus:

Blue-footed boobies, giant land tortoises

Best time to go: Anytime

Lens choice: 24 mm to 400 mm



No island chain on the planet is as synonymous with wildlife as the Galapagos. Made famous by Darwin and the unique evolutionary patterns of the animals isolated on this archipelago, the Galapagos draw millions of visitors each year. The islands are home to three species of land iguanas, as well as the only spot in the world to find marine iguanas. The animals' comfort levels around people make it possible to get close enough with just a 24 mm and snap beautiful, wide-angle portraits. What to bring: Patience. It's no secret how incredible these islands are, so if you visit during the busy summer or winter seasons, expect



large crowds. To curb the amount of tourists each year, the Ecuadorian government has tight control over the number of daily travelers and their length of stay. In addition, be mindful of the established walking paths and do not stray. Even if an incredible shot is waiting just out of reach, take a breath and respect the laws that have helped preserve this special place.

Pro tip: The amount of depth of field in wide-angle lenses can sometimes be distracting when shooting portraits. Use your most wide-open aperture when approaching an animal to blur the background and keep the focus on your subject.



PHOTO TIP

USE A WIDE-ANGLE LENS TO SNAP FRIENDLY ANIMALS; THIS WAY, THEIR PORTRAIT CAN ALSO INCLUDE THE LANDSCAPE.





3

KODIAK ISLAND, ALASKA

Primary focus: Grizzly bears
Secondary focus: Alaskan foxes, bald eagles
Best time to go: September
Lens choice: 50 mm to 600 mm

Few experiences are as visceral as watching a massive Alaskan brown bear kill its prey from a few yards away. Adding to the wow factor, the grizzlies on Kodiak Island and the nearby Katmai peninsula are the largest in the world — an adult male can weigh up to 1,500 pounds. During the summer months, these beasts gorge themselves on salmon and the occasional seal, offering a unique opportunity for the wildlife photographer to score some incredible imagery. As a bonus, the days are long in late summer, casting beautiful sunset light for hours. The best way to see these massive creatures is by boat tour, and many leave out of Kodiak Harbor. The guides aboard these vessels can transport a photographer within yards of a full-grown grizzly, so many different lens types are useful for creative bear shots. What to bring: The only things bigger than the grizzlies are the mosquitoes. Tote some hard-hitting bug repellent and a mosquito-net hood. It's hard to imagine the number of biting insects that can assault you as you sit in sedge grass waiting to see wildlife, but I can assure you, it's enough to drive you insane. Also, be sure to check with your tour guide ahead of time as to whether they supply wading boots. Walking across the mud flats at low tide without boots is nearly impossible. Pro tip: This goes without saying, but when working around this powerful of an animal, keep one eye open — literally. When I'm shooting within the danger zone of a bear, I force myself to break away from the viewfinder every few seconds to check my surroundings.



BRING ALONG THIS GEAR



Black Diamond Revolt Headlamp This headlamp comes complete with adjustable angle, white- and red-light modes (for night vision), and dimmable/strobe function. \$60



BLUBB Bean Bag
For anyone who
prefers to shoot
wildlife photography from the
car, this 16-pound
beanbag has all
the stability of a
tripod without
having to leave your
vehicle. \$100



Gura Gear Bataflae 32L Camera Bag
The main chamber has two sides that can be unzipped and opened independently, plus each is large enough to hold a camera with a telephoto lens. \$429





TASMANIA, SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA

Primary focus: Tasmanian devils

Secondary focus: Wallabies, kangaroos and wombats

Best time to go: March through May

Lens choice: 85 mm to 400 mm

This wild isle off the southeast coast of Australia is known primarily for its most famous resident, the Tasmanian devil. Sadly, tragic times have touched this species — a horrible disease has been steadily pushing them to the verge of extinction. Fortunately, scientists have been relocating healthy devils to the southern Tasman Peninsula and Maria Island. It can be difficult to find these elusive little scavengers, but netting a shot of a devil is like winning the nature-photography lottery. If you want less of a challenge, several sanctuaries allow you to snap these little guys in a controlled environment. What to bring: Tasmania's climate changes dramatically, from the beaches of the Freycinet Peninsula to the summit of Mount Wellington, so you'll want to be prepared for both blistering heat and bone-chilling cold. Unlike some destinations, it's a lot harder to shoot wildlife from a vehicle, so pack some sturdy hiking shoes and be ready to use them. **Pro tip:** Most of the animal population of Tasmania is shy, and with the exception of the adorable wombat, it's highly unlikely you'll be able to get close to any of them. With that in mind, you'll want a good telephoto and a quiet approach. It's always best to snap a few safety shots from a distance just in case you spook your subject while advancing.



LUNDEY, ICELAND

Primary focus: Atlantic puffins Secondary focus: Whales and dolphins Best time to go: May through August Lens choice: 100 mm to 400 mm

Iceland is the largest breeding area in the world for the Atlantic puffin, boasting 3 million to 4 million feathery visitors per year to the volcanic island. Although these beautiful birds spend most of their lives in the water, they come ashore during the summer months to hatch and rear chicks along the rocky shoreline. Lundey, meaning "Puffin Island" in Icelandic, is a three-minute boat ride from the busy capital of Reykjavik and is home to around 30,000 of these birds. Coincidentally, puffin season coincides with whale-watching season, offering the chance to catch sight of minke, humpback and killer whales. What to bring: Carry equipment that's easy to transport on and off a boat. You'll be surrounded by water, so a dry bag large enough to hold a camera and telephoto lens combo would also be wise. The temperature in Iceland can be finicky and change quickly; pack layers and rain gear to be ready for any situation. Pro tip: Whether you're out privately or with a puffin tour, when shooting from a boat, remember to bring your longest, fastest lenses that you can handhold without fatigue. The Norwegian Sea is not always calm, so keep your shutter speeds as fast as possible to prevent both camera shake and subject blur.







MOLOKAI/MAUI CHANNEL, HAWAII, U.S.

Primary focus: Humpback whales Secondary focus: Spinner dolphins Best time to go: December through April Lens choice: 100 mm to 400 mm

Surfers off the shores of Molokai say that during the height of the whale migration, they can hear the calls of these massive mammals while waiting for waves. Not surprising; every year, an estimated 10,000 humpbacks cruise through the narrow channel between Molokai and Maui, offering some of the most reliable whale-watching in the world. From atop the hills on Molokai, it's not uncommon to see 12 different spouts at a time, and photographers can often catch the most coveted shot of a whale fully breaching from the water. What to bring: Most outfitters use boats large enough to avoid worries about sea spray, but if you decide to take a zodiac or a small boat, be ready with a dry bag to keep gear free of salt water. The temperature in Hawaii is typically perfect, but don't forget sunscreen to survive the long hours at sea. Pro tip: Bring your polarizing filter and use it — the water and sky will both be a richer blue, and the filter helps cut down the haze on foul-weather days. Using the polarizer is going to cost you a stop and a half of light, so don't forget to crank up your ISO as necessary and keep the shutter speed fast enough to catch the action. When shooting whales, I prefer to keep my camera up and ready just below my eye, so if something happens quickly, I have only a couple of inches to travel before I can begin firing.

PHOTO TIP

SMALL MOVEMENTS MAKE A BIG IMPACT ON BACKGROUNDS. SCAN THE EDGES OF YOUR FRAME FOR ANY DISTRACTING ELEMENTS.





SANIBEL ISLAND, FLORIDA, U.S.

Primary focus: Wading birds Secondary focus: Migratory birds Best time to go: October through April Lens choice: 100 mm to 600 mm

Sanibel Island, home to the Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge, is renowned as one of the best places in the South to observe wading birds. The park consists mainly of a 4-mile nature drive that winds through marsh and river habitats, taking you past bodies of water where you'll observe herons, roseate spoonbills, egrets, ibises, kingfishers and pelicans.

What to bring: The best times of day to shoot birds are just after sunrise and just before sunset — coincidentally, the same time mosquitoes emerge to find a meal. Bug spray is not only suggested, it's a must. The good news: You don't need to do much hiking in Ding Darling, and most of your photos can be taken out of the car window. Pro tip: A beanbag can be your best friend when shooting from a vehicle. Just set one over the frame of your door and window seam, then rest your telephoto on top for the ultimate in mobile stability.

BOLO REI, AZORES

The name of this confection translates into King Cake, and it's usually sold at bakeries until Dia de Reis on Jan. 6. Consider it a Portuguese spin on panettone — a wreath of soft, white dough filled with raisins, nuts and bits of crystallized fruit.



CHRISTMAS PUDDING, JAMAICA

Cherries, currants, prunes, raisins and dates form the basis of this dark, dense pudding, usually available the weeks before Christmas. Some recipes even call for the fruit to macerate in rum for up to a year.



HOLIDAY TREATS

On islands around the world, end-of-year celebrations are often accompanied by limited-edition sweets. Here are six not to miss.

BY MATT VILLANO



TURRON DE COCO, CUBA

These chocolate-drizzled coconut goodies are a high-light of *Nochebuena*, the traditional Christmas Eve dinner. Around the holidays, street vendors sell them solo or by the box.



ROSCA DE REYES, MEXICO

Mexico's take on King Cake is topped with dried or candied fruit like figs, oranges and cherries, meant to represent jewels on a crown. Plus, it comes with a twist: Bakers fold in plastic Nativity figures, and finding them is a game for the whole family.

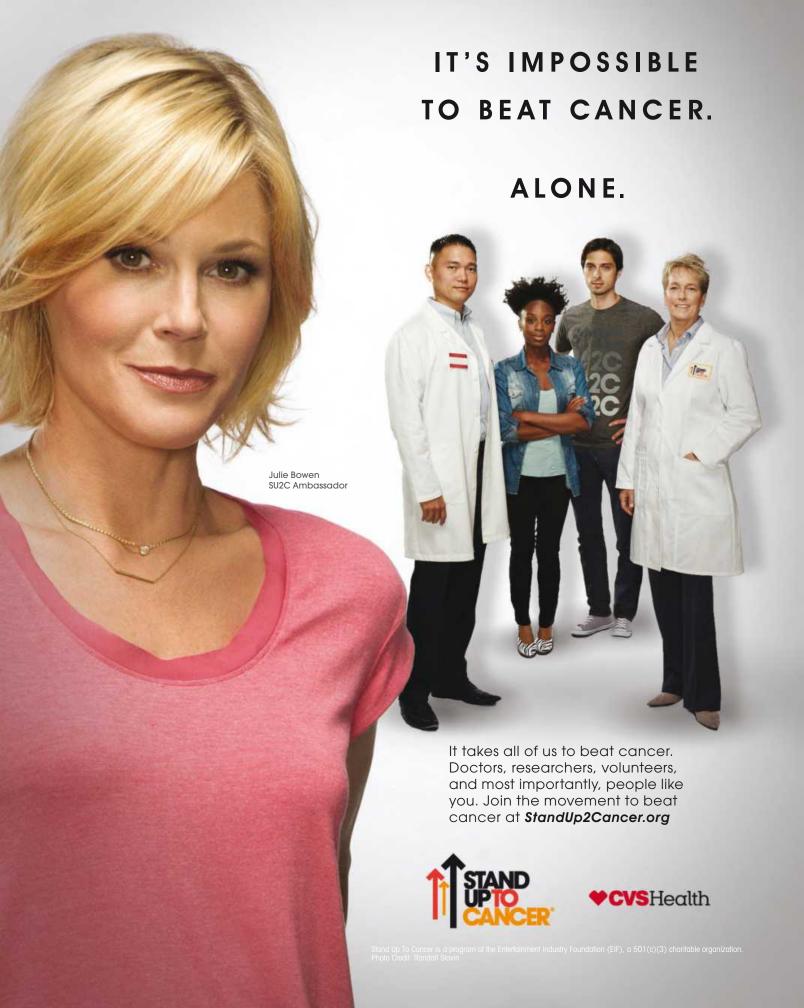
LUSSEKATTER, SWEDEN

Traditionally eaten on St. Lucia's Day in December, these Twinkie-size buttery buns are spiced with saffron and often have raisins tucked inside. Think of them as tea cakes in the shape of a backward S.



TORRONE ALLA MANDORLE, SICILY

History books say Italians borrowed the recipe (egg whites, honey and various nuts) for these nougat candies from Middle Easterners more than 1,000 years ago. They're usually served in bite-size rectangles. If you have dental work, be warned: Some can be as hard as rocks.



"Not counting layovers, I've traveled 25 hours





and gold oak leaves shift against a pale blue sky fringed with rain clouds. It's a lovely lateautumn day a long way from where I live. To get here from Oregon, I flew over the Pacific Ocean to Sydney, then across the continent to Perth. I hitched a ride a few hours south to the Margaret River region, where I met Peter Norris, of Go in Style tour company. He drove me through rolling wine country and groves of gum trees to the timbering town of Manjimup,

in the southwest corner of Australia. Not counting layovers, I've traveled 25 hours to reach this orchard. In search of what? A subterranean fungus.

Fabio Dietos, manager of Oak Valley Truffles, walks down a column of trees, scanning the ground. "It's early in the season," he says, "so I don't know what we'll find." The black truffle, one of the world's most coveted foods, is one finicky fungus. It grows only on the matured roots of oak and hazelnut trees, and it ripens only in winter. Conditions must be perfect — warm days and cool nights, soil damp but not sodden, with a pH between 7.5 and 7.9.





Those exact conditions happen to coincide in the Perigord region of Southern France, where truffles are traditionally cultivated. A decade ago, a few Aussies wondered if the climate and soil in Margaret River, which grows some of Australia's best wine grapes, might be suitable for truffles. Oak Valley planted about 38,000 trees — and now those roots are bearing fruit.

Devotees describe truffles in poetic olfactory detail, how they smell of pistachios and warm brie, or like a stand of conifers after spring rain. They remember where they ate truffles and how they were served: "shaved atop pasta outdoors in Carmel," or "infused into cheese at that little Paris bistro."

But you can't taste someone else's memory. In my experience, fresh truffles are a figment — always out of stock or out of season. A truly fresh truffle should be used within a week of harvesting. "You must taste it for yourself," the initiated proclaim. Yet this never comes from anyone actually in possession of a fresh truffle that I myself might taste. So I had

come all this way to where they grow to join the exclusive club.

Truffle hunter Leah arrives with her dog, an Australian kelpie named Bree who's darting around, excited. Pigs were once used to hunt truffles, but they liked to eat the fungi they found, so now most hunters use dogs. A trained scent dog can suss out a single mushroom in a huge orchard and also differentiate ripe from unripe truffles underground. Bree zigzags down the rows of trees. She lights on a scent, then runs a lightning-quick spiral following it down to its source. She marks the spot with her paw, backs off a few feet and sits, ready for a treat as reward.

Fabio digs in a circle around the buried fungus, careful not to nick its flesh, and lifts out a mottled orb the size of a pingpong ball.

TRAVEL TIP

A road trip is the best way to explore Western Australia's forests and wine region.

SAY OUR EDITORS

Later, he chops the truffles we've found into a coarse powder. I put a pinch on my tongue. It tastes like nothing. "Truffles need a little warmth to release their scent," Fabio says. "And then it enhances the flavors it interacts with."

We sprinkle truffle on the white meat of marrons, crayfish native to the area, still steaming from the boiling pot. The singular scent of the fungus comes first, followed by the sweetness of the shellfish. The sum sensation of fresh black truffle, warmed and commingled, is like rising bread dough and chai. Or newly turned earth beneath a plum tree growing in an active volcano. Sort of.

No static description does it justice. A food with no taste of its own, only a scent — is that the flavor of metaphor itself? The fecund aroma echoes and enhances the flavors, meanings and emotions that surround it. Were I in love with an Aussie girl but a vast ocean intervened, then truffle would taste like affection and tears. And would it be worth all the travel and trouble? Now I know. It is. You must taste it for yourself. — Matthew Miller

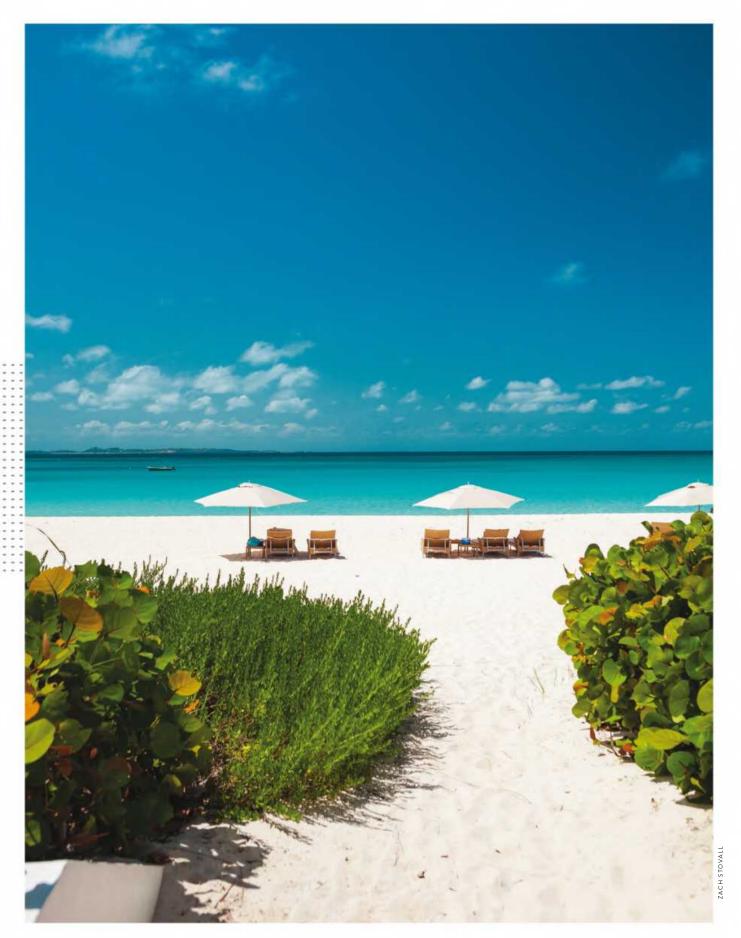


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54 ISLANDS DECEMBER

STAY HERE

Cap Juluca, Anguilla

WHEN TO GO

TO APRIL

Dry season means high temps, but trade winds bring relief • In March, catch the Moonsplash music festival

On an island known for its sublime beaches, Maundays Bay ranks as one of the best. And from your shoreside chaise longue at Cap Juluca, enjoy a front-row seat as attendants deliver complimentary chilled towels and refreshing homemade sorbet.

These are among the many perks at this whitewashed,

Greco-Moroccan-inspired retreat, one of the first luxury properties to pop up on Anguilla. That was 28 years ago, but the resort is looking fresher than ever, with an overhaul of its 70 rooms housed in 15 oceanfront villas. Splurge

on the new Jonquil Suite, with two bedrooms and a private infinity pool. *capjuluca.com* 56
WHAT'S NEW IN THE WORLD OF RESORTS

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THE COOLEST CRUISE SHIP AMENITIES

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THE FIRST LUXE BOUTIQUE STAY IN SANTO DOMINGO



FEELING IRIE

Along with its 10th anniversary, Jamaica's **RockHouse resort** is celebrating its newly opened Bath House spa. Built from indigenous wood and reflecting Negril's laid-back vibe, the space specializes in holistic bathing therapies such as "Release," which uses mint to detoxify the body and boost the immune system. Bathing rituals start at \$75; rockhouse.com



GOOD SCENTS

Who says you can't bottle an island's essence? Tommy Bahama's latest fragrance, St. Kitts for Men, evokes the woodsy aroma of the former British colony, with notes of the isle's bright citrus fruits. A spritz is just the antidote for those long winter days when you can't escape to the beach. 3.4 oz. eau du cologne spray, \$65; tommybahama.com







MASTERING THE MARGARITA

Impress friends and family back home with your Mexican mixology and cooking skills. **Capella Ixtapa**, on the Pacific Coast in Zihuatenejo, has just introduced margarita classes, where you'll learn the finer points of making Mexico's signature cocktail. Pair it with ceviche and Guerrero-style lobster *pozole*, prepared in tandem with the resort's executive chef. Recipes and a passion for crafting duck tamales will follow you home. *Margarita class*, \$75; cooking class, from \$135; capellahotels.com/ixtapa



NEW IN NEVIS

Privacy is part of the equation, but service is the secret sauce at Nevis' first all-villa beachfront resort, **Paradise Beach Nevis**. Butlers at the barefoot-chic hideaway — with two- or four-bedroom villas, each with pebble-lined plunge pools and beach views — will arrange picnics on nearby Pinney's Beach, water transfers to stylish St. Barth and any spa treatment, meal or activity you can dream up. *From* \$1,100 per night; paradisebeachnevis.com

WELLNESS IN WAIKIKI

With the new programs at **SpaHalekulani**, in the historic Halekulani hotel in Waikiki. quests can sign up for individualized curricula that focus on mindful eating and the mind-body connection. They can also spend oneon-one time with in-house lifestyle coach Kamala Skipper. Try the Health Cleanse to purge your body of toxins, then head home with a schedule of Skype check-ins. Packages from \$195; halekulani.com



A RAW DEAL

Miami comes to the Dominican
Republic with this month's opening
of **Pubbelly Sushi at Casa de Campo's Marina**. The Asian-Latin menu translates
into small bites like tostones con ceviche,
steak anticucho and squid with smoked
garlic. Expect a fashion-forward crowd
in the buzzy space. pubbellyboys.com

RENT THE RUNWAY IN MEXICO

Forget to pack an evening clutch for your Puerto Vallarta getaway? It's no problem if you're staying at all-inclusive Casa Velas resort, whose inventive **Handbag Bar** lets you borrow — gratis! — purses from the likes of Tory Burch, Michael Kors and Carolina Herrera. Or go local with a Pineda Covalin, the Hermès of Mexico, to carry your lipstick and

room key from bar to restaurant. For a special night out, the hotel also offers a jewelry-rental program: Diamonds ranging from a half-carat to a whopping 9 carats can be rented for as little as \$200 (with a 48-hour advance reservation). Rooms from \$382 per night; hotelcasavelas .com



NOW ON BOARD

The newest ship amenities with the biggest bragging rights

BY BROOKE MORTON



GUARANTEED POOLTIME

A virtually invisible membrane roof stretches across the sun deck and pool - keeping out inclement weather and assuring a dip - on AIDA Cruises' new *Prima* vessel. The ship is bound for ports worldwide, setting sail March 22, 2016, from Hamburg, Germany, to Yokohama, Japan. Come nightfall, the dome doubles as a projection screen for laser and virtual star shows. The 86-day maiden voyage starts at \$10,638 per person. aida.de

BIONIC BARTENDER

Imagine a future where you order via an app and a robotic bartender muddles, shakes and strains the perfect cocktail in under a minute. That future is now on Royal Caribbean's *Quantum of the Seas* and its soon-to-debut *Harmony of the Seas*. Bonus: no need to tip. royalcaribbean.com

YOUR IN-ROOM SPA

They had us with unlimited spa treatments. On Regent Seven Seas Cruises' new 750-passenger Seven Seas Explorer, setting sail July 2016, the Regent Suite includes an in-room spa treatment area – a first at sea. Those who book it receive unlimited massages, facials and as many other spa services as they like. The twobedroom suite also boasts a sauna, glass-enclosed hot tub and 270-degree views of the sea. Rates start at \$5,000 per person, per day. rssc.com



COLD FRONT ON DECK 16

On most cruise ships, the place to chill out is the pool. On Norwegian Cruise Line's newest and largest, Norwegian Escape, which debuted in October, the coolest relaxation spot is the Snow Room in the Mandara Spa. This cave-like space, chilled as low as 21 degrees Fahrenheit, gives guests the Scandinavian relaxation experience of hopping between heat and cold to increase immune benefits and circulation. Granted, snow bunnies should spend only a few minutes inside. Once core temperatures drop, it's recommended to continue relaxing in other areas of the spa, like the salt room. Sevennight cruises start at \$829 per person; weeklong passes to the Thermal Suite, which includes the Snow Room, start at \$199 per person, ncl.com





BUTLER SERVICE

Guests of Royal Caribbean's Royal Suite Class who opt for Star Class service — the top of three new high-end tiers - can luxuriate with 24-hour butler detail. The Royal Genie service is available on Oasisand Quantum-class ships starting in May. Not only will a personal assistant, trained and certified by the British Butler Institute, unpack luggage and make dinner and show reservations, he or she will also shake up custom cocktails. And your butler can take care of shore excursions. customizing tours if the available options don't match your interests. Also included: Free Wi-Fi and gratuities. Alas, vour butler can't make sure you don't miss the boat. Tier 1 per-person fares from \$5,799. royalcaribbean.com

MORE NEW ADDITIONS FOR 2016: SILVERSEA
Starting in 2016, all guests of Silversea
Cruises will enjoy free Wi-Fi — but it's capped at one hour per person per day. Those in the Medallion suite class and higher will receive unlimited Wi-Fi.

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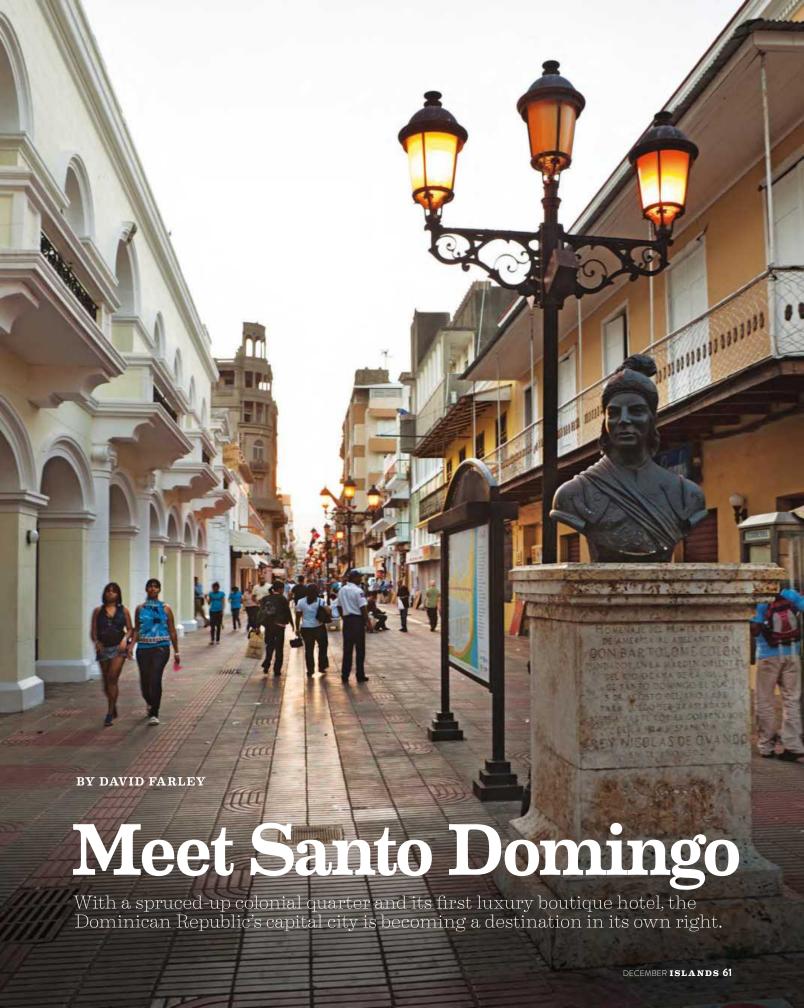


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but this was a first. The front-desk clerk plops an iPhone into my hand, saying, "Take this, and if you need anything — anything at all — just call."

I look down at the phone and squint, tilting my head to the side as if I were a caveman who had suddenly been zapped into the future. "Really," he says. "We provide these to all our guests."

And so began my long weekend at Casas del XVI, the first — and only — luxury boutique hotel in the Dominican Republic's capital of Santo Domingo.

The metropolis is largely a mystery to the average tourist, the one lured to the long, wide beaches and all-inclusive resorts in Punta Cana. While sipping a Coco Loco with my toes in the sand certainly sounded tempting, the capital—the oldest city in the Americas, founded by Bartholomew Columbus, the younger brother of Christopher, in 1498—promised cobblestone streets, sprawling plazas and 15th-century Gothic cathedrals. It's like a slice of Europe, just a 3 ½-hour flight from New York.

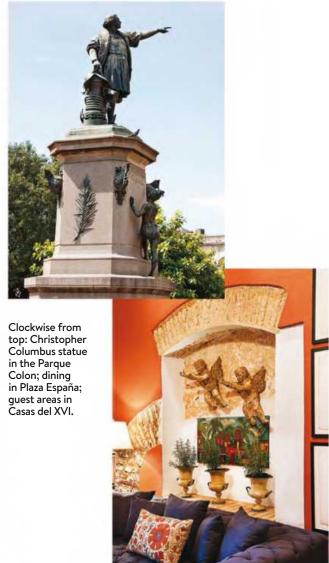
Casas del XVI is smack-dab in the middle of the compact old quarter known as the Zona Colonial, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A complex of restored colonial residences, it debuted as a hotel in 2014 with two villas and seven rooms; this past August, a third villa was unveiled, for a total of 10 rooms.

The property features two pools: a plunge pool in Casa Macorís' garden and a full-size pool in Casa de los Mapas' court-yard. (Both are open to guests, unless every room in the villa is bought out by a private party.) Despite the hotel's small size, each villa is equipped with its own concierge and butler. I was booked in Casa Árbol, named for the 200-year-old mango tree in its courtyard — an ideal spot for breakfast.

HOTEL TIP

Can't decide where to eat dinner? **Casas del XVI's private chef** will whip up a menu of classic Dominican dishes. Enjoy your meal in the hotel's romantic courtyard.





My high-ceilinged, wood-beamed guest room has colorful tile work, prints of local flora adorning the walls and contemporary black-and-white decor, dominated by a tall four-poster bed. The first two rooms of the villa, just off reception, are a library and a bar area. Here, you can sip a glass of Brugal, a local rum, and plan excursions with a personal concierge.

Craving an authentic Dominican dinner, I check in with my concierge, Alvin. He recommends Adrian Tropical, a spot away from the Zona Colonial — and one of the few restaurants to take advantage of the city's seaside location.

As I stroll down the Malecon toward my destination, I realize I need an ATM. Rather than eat up my data looking for the nearest one, I decide to use my hotel-issued iPhone. The front-desk clerk answers. "I will call you back in two minutes, Mr. David."

Sure enough, 120 seconds later, my phone rings. "OK," he says. "There is one near you. Go two blocks, turn left and walk up one block." Success! Dominican pesos in hand, I order up a bowl of addictive *sancocho*, a stewy local dish bobbing with everything-but-the-kitchen-sink ingredients: succulent pieces of pork

belly and avocado, yucca, plantains, cilantro, garlic, small ears of corn, and, just for good measure, chicken. If I weren't so full, I would order a second bowl.

The next morning at breakfast, I'm enjoying a hearty Dominican-style menu of *mangu* (stewed plantains), eggs, fried salami and lightly fried cheese when Alvin places a glass of juice in front of me, describing it as "fruit punch."

"Does it happen to have vodka in it?" I ask, mostly joking.

"No," he says. "But do you want? What is your favorite brand?" he asks, walking in the direction of the lobby bar. I laugh,



CITYTIP

Anthony Bourdain made Meson de Bari popular, so go to **El Conuco** instead. The Dominican dishes are even better, particularly the lunchtime buffet.

SAYS EDIVER TAVERAS, SANTO DOMINGO RESIDENT

saying it's too early for vodka.

"You don't understand," he tells me. "Dominican people don't look at the clock to decide when to drink alcohol. It's never too early to drink here."

I opt for the teetotaling route and spend the day exploring the Zona Colonial, zigzagging my way across the cobblestone streets, passing many firsts in the Americas — the first paved road, the first hospital, the first convent, the first

military fort — until I make it to the ruins of the first monastery, San Francisco. The concierge recommended this spot: Every Sunday evening, they feature a free live merengue concert, a native style of music known for its fast, up-tempo, funky Latin beats. I stand toward the back sipping a bottle of local beer, Presidente, watching a 12-piece band tear it up on stage, while around me hundreds of locals gyrate their hips and bob their heads.

This is not just about music, I think. This is a trip. It's Santo Domingo wrapped up in a tiny swath of the city, everyone united by rhythm: from the well-dressed wealthy to the working class, all drinking cold beer and dancing together.

I walk back to the hotel, feeling fulfilled by the city and hoping to find a restaurant open late enough to serve me one last bowl of *sancocho*.

From \$339 per night; casasdelxvi.com



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How to Experience a Volcano

Jad Davenport shares where to have close volcanic encounters — and survive.



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Resort, followed by a short
hike up the crater for views of
fiery lava bombs. Don't forget
a handkerchief and glasses to
keep ash out of your lungs and
eves. whitegrasstanna.com

2 INTO THE ZONE Soufriere Hills erupted in Montserrat in 1995. The volcano remains active, and the uninhabited area around it is an exclusion zone, but you can still join guided tours to the Volcano Observatory for geologic exhibits about the island and its peak, or journey even deeper to the very edge of the zone. montserratislandtours.com

3 NIGHT HIKE In Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the Big Island, lava flows from Mount Kilauea into the sea, producing towering steam clouds. Blue Hawaiian Helicopters will take you wheeling around the phenomenon, or plan a hike at dusk. Stay on the trails and wear long pants and leather gloves — lava can be

68

A UNIQUE WAY
TO ISLAND-HOP
THROUGH
THE RVI

ADD PUERTO RICAN FLAVOR TO CLASSIC EGGNOG

THE BEST TION CAMERAS TO GIVE FOR THE HOLIDAYS DO'S & DON'TS

1. DON'T worry about sharks; no fatalities have been recorded in the islands, and sharks are extraordinarily rare. If you're lucky, you might spot a gentle nurse shark resting on the ocean floor.



- 2. DO bring several pairs of comfortable goggles, including both a clear pair for overcast days and early morning or lateafternoon swims, and a tinted pair for bright, sunny days.
- **3. DO** get in shape. A simple swimming workout twice per week will help train your muscles.
- **4. DO** drink lots of water. When you're cool and saturated in the sea, it's easy to forget that swimming in the tropics is still exercise, so keep your body hydrated.
- 5. DO remember to smile. Swim guide and naturalist Heather Perry is also a photographer for National Geographic and assembles a high-quality photo book of each journey.



HOW TO ISLAND-HOP THE BVI (BY SWIMMING)

BY JAD DAVENPORT

The British Virgin Islands are famous for island-hopping, but that's usually done by private boat charter. SwimVacation offers a unique opportunity to explore the archipelago under both sail and arm power. Every December and March, the company runs swimming and sailing tours through the islands.

Using *Promenade*, a fully crewed 65-foot luxury trimaran, as the mothership, guests embark on swims ranging between 1 to 3 miles each day (elite swimmers have the option to tackle longer routes). The swims sometimes go from island to island, but they often navigate shallow coral reefs, cut across secluded bays and circle scenic cays. The day's courses and destinations vary depending on weather and sea conditions.

Much of the beauty of the journey comes from enjoying hidden seascapes you might not see by boat; apart from the rainbow of tropical fish, you could come across squadrons of eagle rays or the wreck of RMS *Rhone*. There's also the undersea symphony — listen closely

and you might hear whales and dolphins.

Trips are limited to nine people, with two to three guides. For safety purposes, a stand-up paddle boarder also accompanies each group.

Non-swimming travel companions will find plenty of activities to stay occupied when the trimaran anchors at each island, like exploring beaches, bars and snorkeling sites. And you get a bonus for all the hard work — the abundant guilt-free cocktails and fresh seafood that echo SwimVacation's motto: swim, relax, repeat.

The tour company also offers trips to Hawaii, and they're currently scouting routes along the Turkish coast.

Seven-night sailings from \$3,500 per person, all-inclusive; swimvacation.com

GOOD TO KNOW: YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A TRIATHLETE, BUT YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO EASILY SWIM A MILE AT A STEADY PACE. BRING AT LEAST TWO SWIMSUITS, BUT A WETSUIT ISN'T NECESSARY IN THE CARIBBEAN'S WARM WATER.

In Season

WHITE CHRISTMAS

Puerto Rico's creamy, coconutty concoction is the holidays in a glass.

BY HOLLY V. KAPHERR

Some traditions you just don't mess with. Stateside, come Christmas, we start swilling the eggnog, spiked with bourbon. In Puerto Rico, where the average December temp tops 84 degrees, as soon as the bartender busts out the *coquito*, everyone knows'tis the season.

"Coquito is a classic, creamy rum punch that's an important tradition in Puerto Rico," says Al Amengual, director of food and beverage at El Conquistador Resort & Las Casitas Village. The Spanish settled on the island in the 1400s and brought with them a drink called "posset," hot milk mixed and thickened overnight with alcohol. The recipe evolved into a cold drink made with coconut milk and, the Caribbean's official spirit, rum.



"During the holidays, a bottle of homemade coquito is a welcome host gift at parties. At El Conquistador, we feature the drink in our lobby, along with other local seasonal treats, like coconut cookies," says Amengual.

Mix up a batch to keep in the fridge in case friends drop by, or combine a half-cup of coquito with 1 cup of vanilla ice cream for an adult milkshake that will have you crooning carols along with Bing all night long.

MAKE IT AT HOME

COQUITO

from El Conquistador Resort & Las Casitas Village in Fajardo, Puerto Rico (Makes 1 gallon)

INGREDIENTS

- 2 14 oz. cans condensed milk
- 2 14 oz. cans evaporated milk
- 2 14 oz. cans coconut milk
- 1 14 oz. can cream of coconut
- 4 oz. pure vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. grated nutmeg
- 14 oz. white Puerto Rican rum
- 2 oz. brandy

DIRECTIONS

- **1.** Combine ingredients in a blender in batches and pulse until mixed.
- **2.** Divide evenly into glass bottles and refrigerate overnight.
- **3.** Serve cold and top with a sprinkle of ground cinnamon.

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DON'T MISS A MINUTE OF THE ACTION

BY JON WHITTLE

Photography can be an expensive hobby, but the right gift for your adrenaline-loving photo aficionado doesn't need to break the bank. These four cameras are compact, lightweight and primed for action — perfect for the traveler who wants to pack less gear.





1

GOPRO HERO+LCD \$200

Somewhere along the way, GoPro realized that not everyone needs (or can afford) the powerhouse features on their higher-end silver and black editions, which list for \$400 and \$500, respectively. Enter the GoPro Hero+LCD. an economical alternative that still offers the same quality level the brand is known for. The Hero+LCD shoots excellent 1080p video at 30 fps (frames per second), and 720p at 60 fps for those obsessed with slow motion. On the photo side, users can shoot 5 mp (megapixel) images in single-shooting, time-lapse and burst modes for five image/second sequences. Waterproof to 141 feet.



KODAK PIXPRO 360 EXTREME KIT \$279

Kodak has made a bold entry into the action category with the release of this waterproof camera. The PIXPRO 360 employs a dome lens to shoot 360-degree video from a mounted position, allowing users to capture both themselves and their surroundings in 1080p resolution. The camera also boasts a 10 mp sensor, capable of capturing ultra-wide imagery in both single-fire and 10 fps bursts. Plus, Kodak packaged the PIXPRO 360 in a bundle with attachments for every conceivable purpose, including helmet, handlebar, and suction-cup mounting. Waterproof to 197 feet.





(3)

SEALIFE MICRO HD \$400

Underwater photography and videography have typically carried a prohibitive price tag. No longer. SeaLife's affordable Micro HD shoots 1080p video at 30 fps and 720p at 60 fps, while also boasting a 13 mp camera for stills. In addition to a time-lapse mode, it has a continuous-shooting mode that snaps one photo every second. Unlike most action cameras, the Micro HD is completely sealed, which means you'll never have to worry about cleaning O rings (round sealing gaskets) or ascending to the surface with a flooded camera. Charging and image transfer take place via a USB port, so you don't have to bother with a memory card. Waterproof to 200 feet.



GARMIN VIRB XE

\$400

Building on the original VIRB camera, the waterproof VIRB XE boasts Wi-Fi, GPS. an accelerometer and a gyroscope. So, in addition to the crisp 1440p, 30 fps video, your camera also records your position, speed, depth - even the amount of G-force you're experiencing. On the still side, the VIRB XE shoots up to 30 fps bursts with its robust 12 mp sensor. But where the camera truly shines is in its Bluetooth connectivity; it links to other popular Garmin products, such as bicycle cadence sensors, capturing performance data (speed, heart rate, distance) and lending a whole new facet to your first-person video.





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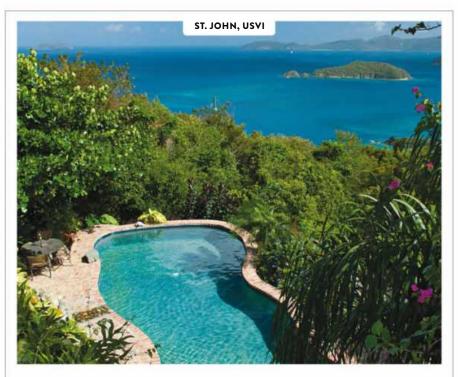
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